

9.28.2007 - The Big Role of Small Business

As a small businessman, from a long line of small businessmen, I know a thing or two about small business. Working at my family's radio station, WWNR in Beckley, I felt the pressure and the fear of failure that all small business owners feel at some point. Given a little time and a lot of hard work, I also gained a deep sense of self pride in watching WWNR grow into one of the most successful small-market stations in the U.S.

Today, as a Congressman, I know the importance of small business to our economy. And as a West Virginian, I know the importance of small business to our state.

I also know that access to capital is a common and growing concern for many aspiring businesses owners; a concern only made worse by the current sub-prime lending crisis and the credit crunch.

According to the Small Business Administration (SBA), in 2006, there were 123,300 small businesses operating in West Virginia. Since West Virginia's small businesses play such a large role in our economy, ensuring that they have access to the tools they need to succeed has never been more important.

When starting a small business, owners are faced with a number of tough financial decisions. Fortunately, there are many programs that are available to assist them, and I have been glad to lend my support to so many of those federal initiatives.

For example, this year the House has passed three bills designed to modernize the SBA to help the agency better serve entrepreneurs in West Virginia and across the country. In combination, these are expected to help improve the climate for investment in small firms, benefiting the nation's current and future entrepreneurs as well as the local communities that depend on the economic fuel these companies provide.

The Small Business

Investment Improvements Act of 2007 (H.R. 3567) will help to ensure funding for eligible enterprising entrepreneurs. The act addresses the current shortfall in capital investment by revamping the SBA's Small Business Investment Company (SBIC) and the New Markets Venture Capital (NMVC) programs. Both are public-private partnerships designed to assist small firms, particularly those owned by veterans and women, in acquiring adequate financing through venture capital.

The bill also creates a new

Angel Investment Program to build the first-ever nationwide network of angel groups to infuse entrepreneurs with seed capital and enhance awareness of available investment opportunities. Angel investors are high net-worth individuals who invest in and support start-up companies. It is estimated that angel investors account for more than 51,000 entrepreneurial ventures each year and are rapidly becoming a common way for startups to obtain capital.

Another bill, the Small

Business Entrepreneurial Development Programs Act (H.R. 2359) of 2007, will expand the role of Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) and expand the SCORE program. In West Virginia, the SBA and the West Virginia Development Office offer a wide range of support services including up-to-date counseling, training, and technical assistance in all aspects of small business management at SBDCs in Beckley, Buckhannon, Huntington, Logan, Northfork, and Summersville.

The SBA's SCORE program has

local chapters in Huntington, Buckhannon, and Lewisburg where small business owners can access free and confidential business training and counseling.

The SBA Women's Business

Programs Act of 2007 (H.R. 2397) will expand the Women's Business Centers across the U.S.,

and increase their services in underserved communities. The SBA's Region 1 Workforce Women's Business Center, located in Beckley, provides counseling, peer mentoring, and training specifically designed to help West Virginia's growing number of women business owners become leaders of tomorrow.

Small businesses are the

grease that keeps the wheels of our economy turning smoothly. They truly represent the American dream. It is an honor for me to be an advocate on behalf of the thousands of small businesses in West Virginia and to do my part to help more citizens achieve the American dream.

